

*The Christian Hearer's First Lesson.*

A  
**S E R M O N**

PREACHED AT

**St. Mary's Church**

· I N ·  
**NOTTINGHAM,**

On *Thursday Octob. the 4<sup>th</sup>. 1694.*

The First Day of a **LECTURE** preached  
there Weekly, by the **MINISTERS** of that  
Town and County.

Publiſh'd to ſaſiſie the Deſire of ſome of the Auditors.

By **CLEM. ELIS**, Rector of *Kirkby in Nottinghamſhire.*

**IMPRIMATUR.**

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TO THE  
**Christian Readers.**

**T** HIS plain SERMON, preached  
at the Request of my Reverend  
Brethren of the Clergy, and here  
published in compliance with the Desire of  
Them, and (as they assure me) of some others  
who heard it ; I do first most humbly offer  
to Almighty God in Prayer for his Blessing,  
that it may become in some measure useful  
to his Church ; and next to you the Christian  
Readers, to make the best use of it you  
can.

It

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## THE PREFACE.

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*If any one of you receive Profit by it, pay, as you are here directed, all your Thanks to Him alone who giveth the Encrease: I only beg that you would assist the Sinful Author with your devout Prayers for the encrease of Grace, lest that by any means when he hath preached to others, he himself should be a Cast-away.*

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THE



T H E  
Christian Hearer's First LESSON.

1 C O R. iii. 7.

*Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the encrease.*

**S** AINT Paul (as we read in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*) had, by the good Blessing of God upon his Labours, been very successful in preaching the Gospel of Christ at *Corinth*, so reasoning, and perswading, that notwithstanding all the opposition and blaspheming of the *Jews*, *Crispus*, the chief Ruler of the Synagogue, believed on the LORD with all his house: and many of the *Corinthians* hearing, believed, and were baptized. Ver. 8.

After his departure thence, came *Apollos*, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, who being fervent in the Spirit, spake and taught diligently the things of the LORD at *Ephesus*: and being come into *Corinth*, helped them much which had believed through Grace; mightily convincing the *Jews*. (ver. 27, 28.) And this is it that St. Paul here saith, v. 6. *I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the encrease.* An Encrease indeed very considerable, as it appears by the Apostle's Thanksgiving to God for it. *I thank my God* (saith he, *Ch. 1. v. 4.*) *always on your behalf, for the Grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was*

confirmed in you. So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in the *Second Epistle*, c. 8. v. 7. he testifieth of them, That they abounded in faith, in utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in their love to him, and their other Teachers.

Here then, by the planting of *Paul*, and the watering of *Apollos*, and the Success which God gave to them both in their Ministry, an eminent Church grew up in a short time, and flourish'd at *Corinth*, of persons sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be Saints. But alas, how imperfect are all the most perfect things that are under Heaven? This so lately planted, so plentifully water'd, so highly commended Church, (as the purest and best constituted Church on Earth will always have) had its spots and blemishes; and those not a few, but many; and some of them of the foulest sort too, and such as did not only stain her beauty, but endanger'd her very Life. The Resurrection of the Dead was denied by some among them; Fornication and Incest, such as the Gentiles would blush to hear of, was committed by others; the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was prophaned by the Irreverent and Uncharitable, by the Drunkard and the Glutton; Stumbling-blocks were laid in the way of the weak Brethren, and their tender Consciences wounded by an unnecessary and uncharitable use of Christian Liberty: Little conscience was made of scandalizing their holy Religion, by going to Law before Infidels; nay, by wronging and defrauding one another: Discipline lay neglected, and there was none of that mourning, which should have been for all these Abominations committed among them. Here then were Corruptions many and great, both in Faith and Manners, and such as, tho' they would not warrant any Member in a Separation from this Church, were more than enow to fire the holy Zeal of all the Members of it, and to engage them all in the most vigorous endeavours for a speedy Reformation in it.

What

What then is to be done in such a case as this? Why, truly all that can be done, providing still for the safety and preservation of the *whole*, and as much as may be, of every *part*. All that can be to *heal*, and *cleanse*, and *edify*, but nothing to *destroy*. Let every Member of the Body, according to its station and office therein, contribute what possibly it can to the preservation of its *Life*, and restoring of its *Health*, but let no Member be *cut off*, so long as the Body may be preserved without such mutilation, and there is hope remaining that the corrupt Member may be cured by gentler means: much less let any Member *tear it self off*, so long as by continuing in the Body it may have life and nourishment. Dividing is a very untoward way of healing, and I think should never be used, but when the case is otherwise desperate. Indeed the Body may sometimes be saved by the loss of a corrupt Member; but it will be very hard, if possible, to keep a Member from dying, that separates it self from a *living* Body, tho' *diseased*.

St. Paul takes a great deal of pains to correct and reform the many Errors and Disorders among these Christians of *Corinth*; but whatever he doth, or orders to be done, for a *Reformation*, he seems to have his Eye continually fixed upon the *Peace* and *Unity* of the Church; considering well, how unhopeful a thing such a Reformation is in a House that is divided in it self: And therefore he goes to work like a skilful *Reformer*. He would have the *old leaven purged out*, but so, that they might still continue *one*, tho' a *new lump*, c. 5. v. 7. He would have the House repaired without pulling it down, or taking it in pieces Stone from Stone: So that the *Foundation*, which he as a wise Master-builder had laid, continue, he thinks it better to leave the *Wood*, *Hay*, and *Stubble*, which others had built upon it, to the trial of the *Fire*, when God shall send it, than to take the building asunder, c. 3. v. 10, &c. He would have the Body kept *sound*; yet so, if possible, that it

may also remain *entire*; that so it may still grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joyned together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in every part, maketh encrease of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love, Eph. iv. 15. Therefore in the first place, he most earnestly exhorts the *Corinthians* to *Unity*, and warns them to beware of *Divisions*, c. i. v. 10. Now I beseech you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joyned together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. And that this earnest Exhortation may appear the more reasonable, he proceeds to demonstrate unto them the unreasonableness of that, which at least was *one*, and it may be a *principal* cause of the *Divisions* which were among them: which in St. Jude's Phrase, v. 16. is, their *having Mens persons in admiration because of advantage*: and in St. Paul's, ch. 4. v. 6. their *being puffed up for one against another*. One will be of *Paul*, another of *Apollos*, a third of *Cephas*, and a fourth is too wise or too good in his own conceit to be taught of *Man*, and will therefore confine *Christ* to his own Party, that he may be taught of *God* only. St. Paul with all plainness informeth their Understandings in the Truth, that Faith may take good rooting. And for this, it may be, his speech seemed contemptible, 2 Cor. 10. 20. What (might some say) can this dry preaching signifie? Give us an awakening Preacher. *Apollos* with a flood of Eloquence watered what St. Paul had planted. And what's all this (might others say) but a vain-glorious ostentation of Art? Let us have plain Reason or Scripture, without all this flourishing of words. O how hard a task have the *Ministers of Christ* in a *Corinth*, in a populous and wealthy Town! where much People is, there is always much variety of Temper, and Humour; and where is much Ease, and Leisure, and  
Plenty,

Plenty of all things, there will be also much *Pride*, and *Wantonneß*, and *Curiosity*. And what *Paul* or *Apollos* is sufficient to deal with all these? Every one's *Humour* or *Fancy* is his *Idol*, and if God himself will not minister to it, he is offended. Every one would limit God in his own Work, to such Instruments as he finds himself most affected with, not considering what he is here told, That tho' *Paul* himself plant, and *Apollos* water, yet *neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the encrease.*

Well then, if we believe *St. Paul*, *The whole vertue and efficacy of Man's Ministry in the Church of Christ, for the conversion and salvation of Sinners, is from the blessing of God.* Neither *Paul's* planting, nor *Apollos's* watering, nor all the unwearied endeavours of the most accomplish'd *Preachers*, can make us good Christians, and bring us to Heaven, without the Special Grace of God.

This is it that I would at present earnestly commend to your most serious thoughts: It is indeed a very plain truth, and stands not in need of an elaborate proof; but the as plain and necessary consequents of it are not, I fear, sufficiently ponder'd by us; and therefore I have thought it not unreasonable at this time to mind you of them. I intend therefore, by God's help,

I. *For the preventing of all Mistakes, briefly to illustrate the Doctrine contained in these words.*

II. *For the help of such as may need it, to point at some of the Uses we should make of it.*

I. *For the preventing of all Mistakes, I shall briefly illustrate the Doctrine contained in these words.* And this, I hope, may be sufficiently done in the shewing you these four things, viz.

I. What



1. *What every Minister of the Gospel may, and ought to do.*
2. *What one Minister may be able to do, more than another.*
3. *That all which the Best can do, is in it self of no efficacy.*
4. *That the efficacy of all is of God only.*

But before I enter upon this, it will be fit to tell you what I *suppose*, and take for *granted* of the *Persons* here spoken of ; which is this.

(1.) That they have a sufficient *Call* to the Office of the Sacred Ministry, and *Authority* to exercise the same, and are no bold Intruders, who run before they be sent.

(2.) That they be furnished with a competent stock of *Divine Knowledge*, and understand the things they are to teach and minister unto others, and are not blind Leaders of the Blind.

(3.) *Lastly*, That they have, at least, such a Faculty of *expression* and *elocution*, as that they may be understood by those whom they are to instruct ; and that they and their Hearers are not *Barbarians* to each other. These things supposed, because I know not how he should be accounted a *Minister* of the *Gospel* that wants them ; I am now to shew.

1. *What every Minister of the Gospel may and ought to do.*  
And it is very plain, that such an one as is qualified as abovesaid, may both *plant* and *water*, and do the whole Work of *God*, so far as he hath thought fit to instruct *Man* with it, and to work himself by the *Ministry* of *Man*. All *Ministers* of *Christ* may and ought catechise and instruct the *ignorant*, and exhort the *knowing* ; *Strengthen* the *weak*, and *establish* the *wavering* ; *comfort* the *afflicted*, *encourage* the *timerous*, and *lift up* the *dejected* ; awake the  
sleepy

*sleepy, spur on the lazy, and warn the confident; rebuke the wicked, correct the erroneous, and direct the doubtful, terrise the presumptuous, and reprove the scorner. They may and ought to feed the Flock of God, and to give to every one his Portion in due season, giving Milk to Babes, and Strong Meat to them who are able to bear it. They may preach the Word plainly and constantly, administer the Sacraments duly and reverently, pray for all Men both publickly and privately, fervently and devoutly. In short, they may exercise the whole Ministry of Reconciliation, which Christ hath committed unto them; behave themselves as Examples to the Flock whereof they are made Overseers; shewing themselves Patterns of Good Works, and making others see in their holy conversation the narrow way to Heaven. These things, I say, all who are fit to be called Ministers of the holy Gospel of Christ, may and ought to do: And these are indeed great things, and they who do them are not to be set at nought and despised, but to be esteemed very highly in love for their Work's sake; and so, no doubt of it, they will be, if, as it there follows, (1 Thess. 5. 13.) we can once again be so happy as to be at peace among our selves. They are God's Ministers, by whom men may believe, v. 5. His Servants, sent forth to invite us to Heaven and Eternal Blessedness; his Attorneys (if I may so speak) to seal unto us in his Name the Mercies of the new Covenant. They can tell us words whereby we and our Houses may be saved, Act. 11. 14. By taking heed unto themselves, and to their Doctrine, they may both save themselves and them that hear them, 1 Tim. 4. 16. They are labourers together with God, v. 9. Stewards of the Mysteries of God, Ch. 4. ver. 1. Ambassadors for Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 20. Whilst therefore they are faithful to their Great Master, they ought to have the Honour due unto their Character. We have thus in short seen what all Ministers ought to do.*

2. Let

2. Let us now see, *What one Minister may be able to do more than another.* And that one may be able to do a great deal more than another, I think no man can doubt, when he considers, that God hath not given to all the same number of *Talents* to improve withal: And one may do *five* times as much with *five Talents*, as he can do with *one*. There never was (that I know of) such an equality in *Ministers*, as excluded all difference in degrees of excellency or usefulness. Whilst immediate inspiration lasted, and the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit were in a manner common, every one who had them, had them not all; nor had all they who had the same Gifts, those same Gifts which they had, in the same measure; the *Spirit divided to every one severally, as he would*; to one *this*, and to another *that*, yet *to every one to profit withal*, 1 Cor. xii. 7, 11. All the *Apostles* had not St. Peter's boldness of Spirit, presence of Mind, quickness of Apprehension, forwardness of Speech, Zeal, or Courage: All were not, like *James* and *John*, *Boanerges, Sons of Thunder*: All had not *Paul's* Learning, nor his admirable Patience, and indefatigable Industry; nor can all be supposed to have had *Apollos's* Eloquence. One *Minister* of Christ may have a more faithful *Memory*, and another a clearer *Judgment*, and a third a more fruitful *Invention*, and a fourth a better *Elocution*. One may have more *Reading*, and another more *Experience*, a third more *Zeal*, and a fourth more *Prudence*. One may be more *knowing*, and another more dexterous in *teaching* what he knows. One may *discourse* more *copiously* and *plainly*, and another may *argue* more *closely* and *nervously*, and another *persuade* more *warmly* and *affectionately*. One may *insinuate* more *sweetly*, and another may *rebuke* more *cuttingly*, and a third may *instruct* more *convincingly*. One may be more dexterous at *planting*, another at *watering*, a third at *weeding*, and a fourth at *fencing*; and another may exceed all in *pruning* off the luxuriant Branches, and  
cherish-

*cherishing the tender Plants.* Now, all these, and the like, wherein one may be able to do more than another, are very good things, and in some competent measure necessary in every *Minister* of Christ. And yet it is no less absurd, to expect the same abilities, and degrees of such Ministerial Accomplishments and Perfections in all *Ministers*, than it would be to imagine, that all *Artists*, or Men of any one Profession, should be of equal Skill, Prudence, Industry, and Activity. Taking it therefore for granted, That one may do more than another, and all the *Builders* in God's House must not be thought equal to that wise Master-builder St. Paul; let us now see what we may expect from the very best of them. To this I say,

3. *That all which the Best can do is in it self of no efficacy.* Neither is Paul himself, nor *Apollos*, anything; that is, of any use at all to us, without the special Blessing of God, whose very weak Instruments, and no more but so, all, even the best qualified *Ministers* of the Gospel are. Let us do all that ever we can to do you good, we cannot by any Art or Skill, Power or Pains that we have or can use, make any one of those whole that are sick, strong that are weak, and much less can we make alive them that are dead in *Trespases and Sins*. We cannot in the least measure benefit any one of those, towards whom we exercise our *Ministry*.

It is true indeed, we find St. Paul (Chap. iv. 15.) speaking thus of himself to the *Corinthians*, *In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel*: And thence he rationally enough inferreth, That though they had since that *Ten thousand* other Instructors, yet should not their kindness for any of them, how well soever they had deserved it, abate any thing of the love and honour which were still nevertheless due to him, as the first Instrument of their conversion. They might respect their other Teachers as



good and tender *Nurses*, but ought still to give him the honour due unto a *Father*, and *be followers of him*. Yet after all, *St. Paul* acknowledgeth himself herein to be no more but an Instrument in another's hand. He *begat* them, but *in Christ Jesus*, and that by the *Gospel*, whereby was sown in them by *God* himself that *incorruptible Seed* of which alone *Men* are reborn *Christians*, 1 *Pet.* 1. 23. He tells the *Galatians* also ( *Chap. iv. 19.* ) That *he travelled in birth again till Christ was formed in them*: This is indeed a high expression of his truly *Parental Affection* for them, of the great *pains* he took with them, of the *troubles* he cheerfully underwent for their sake, and of his earnest *solicitude*, and ardent *desire* of their proficiency under his *Ministry*, and his great *grief* of Heart to see them so soon turn'd away from the *Doctrine* he had taught them, and unto which he now labours again to reduce them. But *the forming of Christ* in *Men* is the work of no less than that *Divine Power* that once formed for him an *Humane Body* in a *Virgin-womb*.

What is it that the ablest *Ministers* can do to make *Men* good *Christians*? Alas, all comes to no more but this: They can declare and lay open the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* to *Men* fully, plainly, and sincerely. They can exhort, persuade, and desire *Men* frequently, earnestly and heartily to believe and practise it, and shew them very good *Reasons* why they should do so. They can direct them to the best helps, and warn them to take heed of all *Letts* and *Impediments*, and shew them the danger of *Temptations*. They can admonish them when they are out of the way, and labour by all means to reduce them into it again, comfort them in it, and encourage them to persevere therein unto the end; and, in a word, administer unto them all the things which *Christ* hath put into their hands to administer, as they can have opportunity of administering,  
and



and can find persons capable of receiving the same. Finally, They can incessantly pray to God for a Blessing upon all they do : And so indeed they have great need to do ; for when all that they can do is done by them, they have but done what the Husbandman can do towards a good Harvest ; they have ploughed and sown, but know not what the Crop will prove. They do but hold a glorious Light before a blind Eye, and sing a melodious Song to a deaf Ear, and give very good Advice to Fools and Madmen. To make Men see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, to bring them to themselves, and make them understand with their Hearts, that they may be illuminated, converted, and healed, is not the work of Man ; our Necks are too stiff to bend, our Wills too sturdy to yield, vicious Habits and Customs too deeply rooted to be plucked up, fashionable Sins too impudent to be put out of countenance, our Lusts too rebellious and imperious to be subdued and tamed by Mens reasonings and persuasions. The *strong man armed*, that hath got the possession, will be too strong for all men, and will keep the possession he hath gotten in spite of all that can be done, till the *Man* who is *God* too, come upon him and disarm him. The *strong holds* of Satan within us will not be cast down by the little Batteries of Mens Tongues. And though we that are *Ministers* must never *bold our Peace*, but lift up our *Voices like Trumpets* ; though we must not cease to *cry aloud* ; though we *spare not*, but shout till these *earthen Vessels* of ours crack and fall in pieces, the walls of this cursed *Jericho* will not be so blown down. None but He, whose Voice *shaketh the Heavens* and the *Earth*, can rend the stony Hearts of Sinners. Which is the *last* thing to be now shewn, *viz.*

4. *That the efficacy of all is of God only.* Whoever *planteth*, or *watereth*, *God giveth the increase*. All are as good as nothing, and labour in vain without him. 'Tis true in-

deed, it hath pleased God to make use of the *Ministry of Men* in the building of his Church, and to make them *workers together with* and under *Himself*; and their great business it is, to beseech us *not to receive this Grace of God in vain*, 2 Cor. vi. 1. He hath put his Words into their mouth, and his Seed into their hands; they are made his Seeds-men, and go forth to sow by his command: but still the Seed it self, and all the prolifick vertue of it, the skill and activity of the Sowers, the goodness of the Ground, the Warmth and the Rain, the Growth and Harvest, are all of him. Who must soften the *Highway's-side*? Who must add depth of Earth to the *Stony Ground*? Who must root up the *Thorns* and the *Bryars*? Who must fright away the devouring *Birds*? It is God alone, the *Father of Spirits*, that can create a *right Spirit within us*, restrain our Thoughts from wandering abroad, and the Devil's Temptations from entring in and prevailing. It is he only that can empty our Hearts of *Cares*, and the *love of Riches*, and the *Pleasures of this Life*, which choke the good Seed. He it is that can make the *Heart good and honest*, and prepare and enable it with due attention and affection to receive, and with serious meditation to cherish the Seed sown, and with constancy of resolution to bring any Fruit to perfection. Though *Ministers* are sent to invite us to Christ, yet hath Christ himself told us, *Job. vi. 44. saying, No man can come to me except the Father draw him.* It is God (as St. Paul saith, 2 Cor. ii. 14.) *th at maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place.* He that *by the foolishness of preaching saveth them that believe*, 1 Cor. i. 21. He opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things which were spoken of Paul, *Acts xvi. 14.* St. Paul saith, *He laboured more abundantly than they all*; yet he adds, *Not I, but the Grace of God that was with me*, 1 Cor. xv. 10.

Indeed, our Blessed Saviour had sent forth his *Apostles* to a very unhopeful work, sending the *Lambs* to convert the *Wolves*, a few poor contemptible Men to make Disciples all Nations, had he not promised himself to be with them, *Matth. xxviii.* And the greatest encouragement that St. Paul had to abide preaching the Gospel in such a Town as *Corinth*, lay in those words of Christ, *Act. xviii. 8. I am with thee, and I have much people in this City,* and therefore fear not. He had prepared the Hearts of the People as the Books to be written in, and then he made use of St. Paul's Tongue as the Pen of a ready Writer; and this Writer was God himself. *I* (saith he, *Heb. viii. 10.*) *will put my laws in their mind, and write them in their hearts.* Therefore (saith the Apostle to these *Corinthians*, *2 Cor. iii. 3.*) *Ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ, ministred by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God: Who shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,* *2 Cor. iv. 6.* Indeed, to give light to our dark minds, and to keep the God of this World from blinding them, is the work of him alone who at first brought light out of darkness. He alone can make us *new Creatures*, that is, *Christians*, who breath'd into our Dust the Breath of Life, and made us Men. With what Treasures then soever it hath pleased God to instruct any of us, that we may dispense them unto you; yet still both you and we must know, that we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us, *2 Cor. iv. 7.*

I have held you, I fear, too long in the illustration of so plain a Truth; I shall therefore conclude this part of my Discourse with those words of St. Augustine upon St. John's Gospel, *God gave the Encrease, not by them, but by himself.*

*Deus incrementum dedit, non per illos, sed per seipsum. Excedit hoc humanam humilitatem, excedit angelicam sublimitatem; nec omnino pertinet, nisi ad agricolam Trinitatem.*

This

## The Christian Hearer's First Lesson.

*This is a work which is above not only the meanness of Man, but the height of Angels: nor doth it at all belong to any other but to him who is the Husbandman, that is, the ever blessed TRINITY.*

The Doctrine thus cleared,

II. *For the help of such as may need it, I will point at some of the Uses we should make of it.* And truly, methinks they lye very obvious, both to Preachers and Hearers.

We are this day, by the good Providence of God, entering upon an \*Exercise, wherein our whole design and business is to minister, as God shall enable us, to the good of your Souls. Far be it from us to *beguile you with enticing words, with fair speeches to deceive the simple, or with feigned words to make merchandise of you.* Expect not to have your Heads filled with airy Notions, or your Curiosity fed with fine Speculations; and fear as little to have your Minds perplexed with doubtful Disputations; least of all let any Jealousie possess you, that you shall be entertain'd with splenetick and virulent Invectives against Men and Parties: these things become not us, nor will they profit you: We seek not yours for our selves, but you for God; and I doubt not but I may say it in the Name of all my Brethren, who are engaged on this Service of your Faith, *That we preach not our selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and our selves your Servants for Jesus sake:* That we have no ambition to exercise a dominion over any Man's Faith, but earnestly desire (may GOD of his Goodness make us so happy) to be helpers of your Joy. 'Tis God's Honour, and your Happiness, and both these in the reviving of a sincere and unaffected Christian Piety, now languishing even to death among us, that we solely aim at.

But



But alas, what are we, that we should attempt such things as these? We are nothing, we can do nothing of our selves towards so weighty a Work; all our Sufficiency must be of God. The sense of this directed me to the choice of this Subject, as most proper to humble us, and instruct you. To humble us, I say, in consideration of our utter insufficiency for the important work which lyeth upon us; and to instruct you how, notwithstanding all our weakness, you may be sure to reap some profit by the weakest of us all. And truly, I the rather hope for God's Blessing upon our Endeavours, when I consider with what unanimity and cheerfulness of Mind my Reverend Brethren have consented to this Service. It will now much confirm this Hope, if you shall be pleased (*Worshipful and Beloved*) not only to countenance us with your presence and attention, but to assist us with your devout Prayers.

1. And therefore, next to the humbling of our selves in the presence of God, as nothing without him, unable to serve either Him or you without his Special Assistance, and because of our manifold Sins most unworthy of that also; the first Use which I very heartily desire you to make of what hath been said, is to help us with your daily fervent Prayers at the Throne of Grace, for the pardoning of our Sins, and the sanctifying of our Souls, and the supplying of all our Defects: That *in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we may have our conversation in the World, and more abundantly to youwards at this time, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the Truth, commending our selves to every man's Conscience in the sight of God: That God would open unto us a door of utterance, that we may open our Mouth boldly, that the Word of God may have its free course, and be glorified with you.* Therefore Men profit so little by the Ministry, because they so seldom or so coldly address themselves in Prayer to God,  
for



for his Blessing upon it. Whilst we bestow so much more time in Hearing than we do in Praying, as being the far easier Task of the two, it may be feared we expect more from Men than we do from GOD; and tho' we may carry the Sermon home, we leave God's Blessing behind us. Therefore,

2. Because we are nothing, and all the Encrease is of God, let us take heed how we depend so much on the Ministry of Men, who are nothing, as to attend too little in their Ministry upon God who doth all. Whilst you are pleased to afford us your Ear, be sure that you give God your Heart. Neither regard ye what we say any farther than we *speak as the Oracles of God*. Imitate the *Thessalonians* in this, who *when they received the Word of God, which they heard of St. Paul, and others, received it not as the Word of Men, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe, 1 Thess. ii. 13.* Come with a desire and resolution to hear God himself speak to you (by what Mouth soever he shall speak) and, be sure of it, the Word will be mighty, and prevail.

It is a very lamentable thing, to see in what Extreame we are apt to lose both God and our selves; *First*, Because neither *Paul* nor *Apollos* are *any thing* without God, or in comparison of God; therefore some very rashly conclude, that they are nothing at all to them, and that the Ministry of *such Men* is of no use in the Church, but all are to be taught of God only. And 'tis true, that our chief Teacher is God himself; but if we will be taught of him, we must submit our selves to be taught by him as it pleaseth him to teach us, and not as we have a mind to be taught. What though the very best Instrument be able to do nothing by its self, out of the Workman's hand? Yet even an indifferent one may do much, when managed by the hand of a skilful Workman. I shall only desire one thing to be granted

ted me by him that resolves to be taught of God alone, without the Ministry of Men ordain'd to teach; and I think it a very reasonable request, that before he thus put it to the venture whether he shall be taught or no, he be first very sure, that God *will*, as well as that he *can*, so teach him; or, that he hath not ordained the *Ministry* of *Men* in his Church, or that he will, meerly to humour him, change his ordinary method, and cancel his own ordinance. It is certainly God alone that gives the Encrease in the Field, as well as in the Church; and yet Men are not so unreasonable or confident, as to expect and relye upon a good Harvest from God without the Labour of the Husbandman. Why then should they expect the Fruit of the Spirit without the Labour of the Ministry, till God give them some better assurance of it than yet he hath done? We must not indeed stint God's Power as though he could not work without this or that Instrument; and yet neither must we slight his Institution, and neglect his ordinary method. He that would pluck God's Instruments, how mean soever they seem, out of his hand, and not give him the Glory of magnifying his Strength in the Weakness of Men; tho' he do not thereby disable God from working, yet doth he enough to provoke him not to work.

Others there be, who in another Extream seem to make God himself almost *nothing*, and the *Minister* *all*. Such are they who place the greatest part of their Religion in hearing many Sermons; and when they have heard enough, are apt to persuade themselves, that they have served God well enough. They are wont to be very attentive, with a great deal of Affection, and it may be a great deal too much Admiration, to the Preacher; and to talk much of him, and of his excellent Sermon; and yet all the while are as regardless of God, and address as little to him for

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his Blessing, as tho' they had heard nothing at all of him, nor had any thing to do with him. It is very well, if God be not too often thus put off with a vain shew of Worship, and if the Preacher have not all, but only what in the coveted reputation of *Hearers* and *Professors* we catch at for our selves, of the Honour which is due unto *Him*. The delight which many of us take seems to be too much in the meer planting or sowing, and if that be done, according to our own opinion, artificially, we are mightily pleased; and if not, more offended, and we count all the time lost (as in sad truth it is) which we have spent in hearing. The Harvest and Encrease is the thing that of all others we least think of; as tho' we heard only for hearing's sake. So our Ears be but constantly exercised, a barren Heart, which bringeth forth no Fruit of Righteousness to God, or to our Neighbour, in our Life and Conversation, never troubles us. We are apt to fancy, howsoever we live, that we love God very well, because we love to hear of him; and if this love cool a little, so long as we can ever and anon warm it again by hearing we keep our selves, as we imagine, spiritually alive unto God.

To these two sorts of People a *third* may be added, who seem to attribute so much to the *choice* of the Instrument or Preacher; as if they thought that God himself is like to some Workmen, who cannot do their Work to any purpose, unless they have the very best Tools to work withal. Indeed, the Religion of a great many seems to lye in nothing else but the *itch of the Ear*; which is a *Disease*, and not a *vertue*; and no good Symptom of a sound Heart. The *Apostle* said long ago, *That a time would come when Men would not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts would heape to themselves teachers, having itching ears, 2 Tim. iv. 3.* Now, we may be sure, that where Mens Lusts and Affections chuse their Teachers, tho' the Ear may be clawed

ed, the Heart will remain unsearched. *Sound Doctrine* will fit too hard upon the sore place, and make it uneasy. There are some soft Doctrines, which mightily please whilst they profit nothing. These prick not at the Heart, and so long the Itch may daily encrease, the more that the Sore within putrifies. And tho' the Christian decay, yet as the Itch encreases, the fancy of being a good Christian encreaseth with it; and the Disease within becomes mortal ere it be felt, and the deluded Soul, in a ravishing Dream of going to Heaven, sinks pleasantly into Hell.

3. Let us, from what hath been said, learn how we are to behave our selves in relation to the *Ordinances* of God administred by *Men*. And *first* more generally, Let us see that we rightly discern and distinguish between the Work of GOD, and the Ministry of Man in every Ordinance; neither expecting from Men what God alone can do, nor expecting that God will do that alone, which he ordinarily doth by the Ministry of Men. Remember what *St. Paul* hath told us, That tho' Men are *Ministers by whom we believe*, yet is it *even as the Lord hath given to every man*, (*v. 5.*) that he can either work in any measure, or hope to speed by his working. And tho' *Ministers are Labourers together with God*, in tilling and building, yet still we are *God's husbandry, we are his building*, *ver. 9.* *Except therefore that the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.* Nay, if we trust too much to the Builders, then is their preaching vain, and our faith is also vain, seeing it *stands*, as the Apostle saith it ought not, *in the wisdom of men, not in the power of God.*

More particularly, remember that the Men who minister to you in holy things, are still *Men*, and will as long as they live have more or less the Infirmities of Men. You must therefore be so just, as to allow for the common Infirmities of Human Nature, and so charitable too as to



overlook some personal Failings. If the Workman build on the right Foundation, and by his true Rule; if he do his Work truly, faithfully, and substantially; this ought to satisfie: and tho' possibly there may be wanting something of that stateliness, art, and politeness, which a more masterly and finer hand might have added to it, yet even thus, by the Blessing of God, it will go up apace till it reach Heaven.

If we have already profited any thing by the *Ministers* we have had, we have already also learned thus much of them, That as they are *Ministers* of Christ, they are not to be despis'd; and as they are no more but *Ministers*, they may be too much magnified. That as God can work by the very meanest of them, and we ought not to doubt but he will do so for them that love him; so, provok'd to displeasure by our Sins, he may refuse to work by the most eminent and holy. For us therefore to side with, or to be *puffed up for one against another*, is a very unreasonable thing; and we do but shew thereby, that we are yet too much *carnal*, and walk rather *as Men* than as *Christians*. If he that glorieth in *Apollos* had indeed profited by *Apollos's* preaching, as he ought to have done, he would be very well pleased with *Paul*. And if he that glorieth in *Paul* had improved in sincere Christianity by *Paul's* Ministry, he would be well enough pleased with *Apollos*. He hath not profited by either as he might have done, who is not very thankful to God, who hath provided so well for his Soul by the ministry of either; or doth not wait with Faith and Patience for a Blessing, whichsoever of the two it is that he at present enjoyeth.

I know, that it is pleaded by some, That they cannot *profit*, or are not edified so much by *some* as by *others*; and possibly there may be some truth in this Plea of theirs, and yet, it may be, the fault doth not always lye where they would



would have it laid, but where they have no mind at all to find it. However, what is here pleaded deserves to be consider'd.

And *first*, suppose we (what in this whole Discourse is taken for granted) that the Word of God, the wholesome Food of our Souls, is duly and fully, tho' it may be in a very familiar, and the most homely manner administer'd unto us. If so, then I must needs say, that I see no room at all for this Plea; for it is no less than the Word of God that we receive, and that's the Food whereby our Souls may live eternally, by whom soever, and after what manner soever it be convey'd unto us. The same living Water, coming from the same Spring, hath the same vertue, thro' what Conduit soever it may pass unto us. The sound we hear is the Man's, and that may be less grateful; but still the Word is God's, and should be always welcome. Were it the Word of Men we are to be instructed in, we might well entertain it, according to the credit and reputation the Men have got with us, and so receive it proportionably with more or less Faith and Affection. But being the Word of God, as no instrument of conveyance, can add any thing to its worth and value, so neither ought any one to lessen its welcome. What, shall we vile Worms take that piece of state upon us, that we will not receive a Message of Peace and Reconciliation from the great and glorious King of kings, unless he will do us the honour to send it by one of his chief Servants? Indeed he hath already, as unworthy as we are, done us a far greater honour than that, even to send it by his only Son, *whom he hath made heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and Christ hath committed to us the word of reconciliation, 2 Cor. 5. We are Ambassadors for Christ, and in his stead, and though one may deliver the Mind of his Lord*  
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in better language, or with a more graceful behaviour than another, yet all speaking the same thing, in the same great name, and to the same end, ought to be honourably treated for their Master's sake.

There is, without all dispute, a great deal of difference in the Abilities of Preachers, as there is also in the Tempers, Capacities, and Gifts of Hearers, and in the suitableness of the one to the other. And I will not say, that one may not profit more by some than he can by others. But what then? Can he profit by the best and ablest without the Special Blessing of God? And may he not with his Blessing profit by the weakest? And ought he therefore to hate the one and love the other, to forsake the one and cleave to the other, or to be puffed up for the one against the other? Let it be consider'd,

*First*, That the Scales, it may be, hang a great deal evenner than we (for want of a single Eye) yet think they do. As many good and pious People are edified, for ought we know, by him whom we forsake, as are by him we follow. As this Preacher suits best with the Capacity, Humor and Palate of some, so doth that also with those of others. And then where is the Advantage which the one hath above the other? Or, what hath one Party here to glory in that another hath not? Certainly it well becomes both to joyn together in the Praises of GOD, who as he hath given Men divers Capacities and Palates, hath also by as great a variety of Gifts left none of them unprovided for. If this Air, or this Dish of Meat, agree best with my Constitution, doth it therefore become me to decry all others as unwholesome, tho' they may agree as well with other mens Constitutions as these do with mine?

*Secondly*,

*Secondly*, That which is here pleaded is indeed a Disease and not a Virtue, a thing to be resisted and striven against, and, if possible, to be master'd, and by no means to be indulg'd in our selves. It is a shame for us to be always Children, and it is no advantage or commendation to any one to have a squeamish Stomach. Would we endeavour after a more healthful Constitution, and to be of a more masculine Temper; would we learn to be Men indeed, both in Understanding and Humour, wholesome Food would at once both please and nourish us; and so long as we can have our Food in due season, and in full proportion, we would be less curious and nice, and no more pettishly refuse our Meat, because it is not so prepared as in every thing to hit exactly our Palates. Though therefore the *Minister* that excels another in any thing should not want from us his due Praise and Respect, yet neither need we under another want any thing that is necessary to our Spiritual Health. And were we as sensible as we ought to be of our great Unworthiness of the least of these Helps which God affords us, we would soon grow more thankful for what we have, and not through a squeamish humour lose the benefit of it.

But next I ask this Question, and I beseech you take some pains in examining your selves, that ye may be able to answer it aright. Is there indeed, generally speaking, any truth in this Plea? I dare not say there is none; but I hope I may, without offence to any one, commend unto you all this (as it seems to me) very necessary Caution. Be not over-hastily confident, either that you cannot be edified, where as yet you are not; or that you are indeed edified, where you think you are. Some persons I have known, who through an unreasonable prejudice have been even sick at the sight of some Meat, whereof they could never  
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be perswaded to taste, and yet after they have but once or twice been prevailed with to eat of it, have fed upon it with much both delight and benefit. Possibly then you may not be edified, not because you cannot, but only because you think so, and will not try. And though you think you are edified, you may but think so; for it may well be doubted that you are not edified by the Word of God, if you find it hath not the same good effect upon you delivered by one as by another. Take heed, lest what you call *Edification* be only the heightening of your Fancy for a Man, the enflaming of your Zeal for or against a Party, or the exciting of some Passion or other by certain modes of speech or gesture. I say this to no other end, but to put you upon an impartial examination of your own Hearts; for I conceive, that pure Religion and Devotion are grounded upon and cherished by the Word of God only; and therefore I see not but where that is plainly preached, and yet doth not move so much as when dressed according to Mens Fancies, those Men are not in love with the natural beauty of Religion, and God's Image thereon, but with the artificial beauty that Men bestow upon it.

If the fault of your not profiting be really in the *Minister*, you are so far excusable, and no body can blame you if you go abroad to *seek your Meat*, when otherwise you must be famish'd at home. But if he preach God's Word soundly and intelligibly, how is the fault in him? Some of you will say, it may be, that he is not a *powerful Preacher*; but do you indeed know what it is that you say? Why is not the same Word of God as powerful deliver'd by one as by another? Doth it not sufficiently inform your Understandings? That cannot be, for we suppose it soundly and intelligibly preached. Doth it not equally move your Affections? That's it you mean by *powerful preaching*, or nothing that I know of. And if so, why doth it not?

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Here is the Word of God to do it, what then is wanting ? Is it a neat and curious compofure, a fmoother ftile and fine cadence of Sentences, a pleasing noife and glingling of Words, a nimble Tongue and glib Elocution, a paffionate and hot way of expreffion, the affected accenting or tuning of the Voice, the fetting of the Countenance to the matter in hand, and humouring it either with fmiles, frowns, or tears, a mimical action of the Body ? Or what is it ? Whatever it is, it is well if it be not fomething of *Man* only. I fay not ; but moft of thefe things are, in due place and feafon, decent and commendable : yet are they but fuch things as would work the fame thing in the Theatre as in the Church, from the Stage as from the Pulpit. Now certainly there muft be a great fault, where the Art of Man can affect us, and the Word of God cannot.

To prevent this Self-deceit, I know nothing more proper than the often thinking on the Text I am now preaching on. Whomfoever therefore you hear, remember how very a *Nothing* he is in himfelf, and make your humbleft and clofeft, and warmeft applications to God himfelf.

If you think you have not met with a Minifter altogether fuitable to the Needs of your Souls, yet blame not him that labours for you according to the meafure of his talent. Reflect rather very ferioufly upon your felves, and fee if you cannot find Sins enough to provoke God to withhold from you the Bleffing you defire. The way to obtain a better, is to praife God for his Mercy in affording you any, and to acknowledge his Juftice in fending you a worfe, even for your Sin of not improving more under the worft of all. When you are truly humbled, and by Humility prepared to make a good ufe of whomfoever God at the prefent affords you, He will either blefs the prefent more to your advantage, or fend you a better in his ftad.

How mean foever you may think the perfon whom you at prefent hear, remember for your comfort, that God's power

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is always the same it ever was, and his Goodness no less to all that love him in sincerity. Come then purely in love to God, and he will never send you home without his Blessing. Your only business in these religious assemblies, is to apply the whole attention of your Souls to God in the several parts of his Worship; and till you do so, you come for something else than to honour him. And how can you expect his Blessing when you are not employ'd in his service?

To close all. Come hither to treasure up the Word of God in your Hearts, that you may not sin against him, and let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom, that you may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ daily. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and enuys, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby. And let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Stand fast with one spirit, in one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel: and do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom may ye always shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, that we may rejoice in the day of Christ, that we have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. God grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now, unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all Ages, World without end. Amen.

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